

Covenants versus Contracts

One of the big problems we have today in our culture is that we only think in terms of contracts and never covenants.

In a **contract** if one agreeing party does something in violation of the **contract** then it is considered broken. The whole contract then becomes null and void. The signers of a contract agree to hold up their end as long as the other signatories hold up theirs too.

With a **covenant**, both parties agree to hold up their ends regardless of whether the other party keeps their part of the agreement. A violation of a **covenant** by one party doesn't matter as far as the other party's responsibility to continue to do what ever they agreed to do.

Even though the idea of a covenant seems pretty radical today, there was a time when Covenants were much more widely understood. Covenants weren't always just some obscure spiritual or religious concept.

Example of a secular covenant:

One of the most famous secular covenants, at least in the United States anyway, is the Declaration of Independence that helped launch our nation.

The Declaration of Independence was signed by 56 men who all understood they were committing high treason against the British government when they signed the document. Benjamin Franklin famously highlighted the reality of the time by making this statement. "We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately."

The concluding sentence of the Declaration states:

" For the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred honor."

To the signers it didn't matter if any one of their confederates broke or switched sides. They were still committed to their course of action regardless, even if it cost them their lives. As we know today most of the signers were made to pay dearly for their stand against the British.

In today's culture, however, we have lost the understanding of covenants. We only think in terms of contracts. In our minds all of our agreements are contingent on both parties holding up their ends.

Perhaps that is why we have so many lawyers. Since everything is based on contracts in our minds we need lawyers to tell us what we can and cannot do, or maybe it's the other way around, because we have so many lawyers we have fixated on contracts and lost sight of covenants. Either way, our lost understanding of covenants has had significant repercussions in our society.

The biggest challenge that comes from "contract thinking" is that we misunderstand our relationship with God.

We naturally filter everything we understand about God in terms of a contract. We assume that if we don't hold up our end then contractually, God won't hold up His. As a result many find it nearly impossible to approach a Holy Elohim because they know they can never hold up their end of the bargain. The standard they/we see in scripture is perfection and they know that they are not perfect. Thus, resulting I believe in a great falling away from God's word.

Losing sight of God's covenant with us and framing our relationship with God in terms of a contract completely warps our understanding of who

God is and how He thinks of us. It completely ties us down so that we never come close to meeting our full potential.

Let's use marriage as an example because this is a big area where replacing covenant with a contract is wreaking havoc in our society.

Jesus said this about marriage:

Matthew 19: 1-9, And it came to be; when Jesus had ended these words that He left Galilee and came to the borders of Judea beyond the Jordan (vs 2) and large crowds followed Him and He healed them there. (vs 3) And the Pharisees followed Him, Is it right for a man to put away his wife for any reason? And He answered, said to them, " (vs 4) Haven't you read the scriptures? Jesus replied. "They record that from the beginning God made them male and female." (vs 5) And He said, "This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife and the two are united into one.(vs 6) Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God as joined together. (vs 7) They said to Him, "Why then did Mosheh command to give a certificate of divorce, and put her away? (vs 8) He said to them, " Because of the hardness of your hearts, Moses allowed you to put away your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. (vs 9) And I say to you, whoever puts away his wife, except on the grounds of whoring, and marries another, commits adultery."

Marriage is rightly seen as a covenant between a man and a women which God has joined together. As a **covenant** marriage is "until death do us part"

But a contract marriage becomes "until you do something I don't like."

A contractual understanding of marriage leads to things like no-fault divorce and prenuptial agreements. People enter into marriages with

the assumption that it is going to end. That attitude then, often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy in most cases.

It's more than that though. Once marriage has moved from a covenant to a contract it becomes "just a legal thing". Then there is no real reason why it shouldn't be a contract between any two people who have a legal right to enter into a contract. No longer is marriage seen as a lifetime commitment before God.

Then a contract marriage simply becomes a legal arrangement administered by the state. That means the state has the authority to define marriage however it wants.

So we find ourselves, here today with marriage reduced to a contract instead of a covenant relationship as God originally intended. It becomes much more difficult to come up with good reasons why the state can't acknowledge arrangements beyond a man and woman as marriages.

Right now, the issue is whether homosexuals should be allowed by the government to marry. But if a marriage is only a legal contract, why would it logically stop there and not expand to anyone who is permitted to enter into legal contract. At that point why choose to say marriage is between 2 people? Why not allow 3 people to marry? or 4? Or 5 or 25? It's just a contract right? So why the arbitrary number 2?

Of course when we get there we will have completely kicked the nucleus of family, which is a fundamental building block to society. But if, back when no-fault divorce was just beginning, if anyone had suggested that the logical extension of changing the understanding of marriage from **covenant** to a **contract** would result in homosexual marriages they would have probably been called crazy too.

Contract and Covenant are words that have similar meanings and are often times used interchangeably. They mean agreement, pact, deal, treaty. While the meaning of covenant does encompass these things, it goes far beyond them and greatly surpasses the meaning of contract. God instituted **covenants** as a way to demonstrate His total and enduring commitment, dedication, love and devotion to us. As with every blessing He bestows upon us.

Contracts are usually for a **limited period** of time as opposed to a covenant which is forever. Contracts are an “if - then” agreement.....“if you do this **then** I will do that”. Initiated by one party for their benefit if they can persuade the other party to agree....if it benefits them as well.

Contracts can be broken; not without penalties, granted, but broken all the same. If either party decides that they are no longer being benefited by the partnership or their end has become too arduous to hold up, they can decide to accept the consequences and renege on it.

God **never** reneged on the covenant He established with us and expects the same commitment from us. A **covenant** is **established forever**, till death, Regardless if the other party reneges on their agreement the covenant remains until death.

When something becomes common, its meaning and significance are often forgotten which I believe is what has happened with these two words.

Understanding Covenant

We rarely use the word covenant today. So we need to define the term. Dissatisfaction with service rendered may be a reason for breaking a contract, but not a covenant.

A contract is...	A covenant is...
... a common, legal document regulated by the state.	... a sacred, moral agreement overseen by God.
... based upon mistrust between two people.	... based upon trust between two people and God.
...written to create limited liability.	... accepted to embrace unlimited responsibility.
... embedded with "opt out" or termination clauses.	... intended to be permanent.
... demands joy through mutual benefit.	... seeks joy through mutual sacrifice

The word which is used in scripture for '**covenant**' is BERITH which is from a root which **means** 'to cut or divide', in allusion to the sacrificial custom in connection with **covenant**-making, of dividing the animal by which the **covenant** was ratified, and laying them out in two halves.

The **word** חוזה -contract comes from the root ח.ז.ח. ... A **contract** - a חוזה - is a document that lays out a vision of the future interaction between two or more parties.

Covenant
(ברית / διαθήκη)

The Greek word διαθήκη (diatheke), usually translated “covenant” in English versions of the Bible, is a legal term, a formal and legally binding declaration of benefits to be given by one party to another, with or without conditions attached. In secular contexts it was most often used of a “last will and testament.” In the Greek version of the Old Testament διαθήκη (diatheke) was used as the ordinary rendering for the Hebrew word ברית berith.

ברית (berith) is also translated “covenant” in English versions, but, like διαθήκη (diatheke), it also refers to legal dispositions or pledges which may or may not have the character of an “agreement.”

Sometimes ברית berith is more in the nature of a one-sided promise or grant- which means to (agree to give or allow something requested).

When we see the word “covenant” in the Scriptures, it is important to keep this in mind, because the true sense is often missed if people assume that the word refers to a reciprocal “agreement” or “contract.”

In the Septuagint- (which is a Greek version of the Hebrew Bible (or Old Testament), including the Apocrypha, made for Greek-speaking Jews in Egypt in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC and adopted by the early Christian Churches.) (γ διαθήκη (diathekeis) is regularly used as the translation of the covenant of God (berith), The covenant of God does not have the character of a contract between two parties, but rather that of a one-sided grant.

This matches with the covenant-idea in the Old Testament, in which covenant (berith), even in human relations, sometimes refers to a one-party guarantee which is when a more favored person gives to a less favored one (Josh. 9:6-15; 1 Sam. 11:1; Ezek. 17:13).

The divine covenantal deed is a one-party guarantee. It doesn't come from man at all, but from God alone. This does not rule out the fact, of course, that it involves religious and ethical obligation, namely that of faith and obedience (Gen. 17:9-10).

Example: God's **covenant with Noah**, for example, lays down no stipulations, and it has the character of a one-party guarantee.

It does of course require the faith of man, but its fulfillment is in no respect dependent on the faith, and it's validity is in force for all coming generations, believing and unbelieving (Gen. 9:9).

And in the making of the **covenant with Abraham**, too, in Gen. 15, the fulfillment of the law is in symbolical form made to depend wholly upon the divine deed. Abraham is deliberately excluded — he is the astonished spectator (Gen. 15:12, 17). This was when God put him to sleep and walked through the pieces making a covenant unto Himself.

In the **Sinai-tic covenant**, the stipulations which God lays down for His people sometimes take the form of actual conditions, so that the realization of the promise

is conditioned by them (Lev. 26:15 and Deut. 31:20), but this structural change in covenant-revelation can be explained in connection with the wider promulgation(to make known by decree or proclamation) — it is to extend to the whole nation of Israel — of the covenant, by means of which the covenant-relationship takes on a wider and more external meaning. (Charles Spurgeon)

It is comprised not only of the unconditional guarantee of God to those who walk in the faith and obedience of their father Abraham: it also lays down a special bond, offer of salvation, on the one side, and by responsibility, on the other side. The fact remains that in all the different dispensations of the covenant of grace, God's unconditional promise to Abraham constitutes its heart.

Consequently, when the “new covenant” or Renewed covenant (Jer. 31:33) is announced, one thing is made clear: The covenant-benefits, will itself be granted by the gift of God Himself.

The New Testament or Renewed Testament concept of διαθήκη diatheke lies in the line of that development, especially as Paul thinks of it, in [Galatians 3 and 4], and in such a place as Rom. 9.

That ReNewed Testament concept points to a salvation whose benefits are guaranteed by God, and as a matter of fact are actually given, because in Jesus and through Him the conditions of the covenant are fulfilled.

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1. IN THE OLD TESTAMENT. The Hebrew word for covenant is always berith. The most general opinion is that it is derived from the Hebrew verb barah, to cut, and therefore contains a reminder of the ceremony mentioned in *Gen. 15:17*. (God with Abraham made a covenant unto Himself). Some, however, prefer to think that it is derived from the Assyrian word beritu, meaning "to bind." This would at once point to the covenant as a bond to bind together something, to fasten together, which would then acquire the character of a disposition or arrangement imposed by one party on the other.

2. Berith then becomes synonymous with choq (appointed statute or ordinance), *Ex. 34:10*; *Isa. 59:21* ; *Jer. 31:36*; *33:20*; *34:13*. We also find that karath berith (to cut a covenant) is construed not only with the prepositions 'am and ben (with), but also with lamedh (to), *Jos. 9:6* ; *Isa. 55:3* ; *61:8* ; *Jer. 32:40*. God and man are not equal parties. God is the Sovereign who imposes His ordinances upon His creatures.

This change is important in connection with the New-Renewed Testament use of the word. There has been a considerable difference of opinion respecting the proper translation of the word. In about half of the passages in which it occurs and the Authorized Versions render the word "covenant," while in the other half they render it "testament."

When we look at the word covenant we see it first used with Noah. "but with you I will establish my covenant; and you shall come to the ark, you and your sons and your wife and your sons wives with you. Genesis 6:18 (see Genesis 9:17).

The next use of the word covenant concerns Abraham and the Promised Land. "In the same day God made a covenant with Abram saying, Unto your seed I have given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" Genesis 15:18

The covenant promises of the land of Israel are too numerous for us to list them here so we will continue on.

At Mount Sinai, God gave the Law to Israel and it was there they entered into a covenant with God that they would obey His laws. These were written in a book, which they called the covenant. "And he took the book the covenant, and read in the audience of the people; and they said, All that God hath said we will do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant which God has made with you concerning all these words." Exodus 24:7-8. God's future dwellings with Israel were based upon their agreement to keep this covenant. He told them clearly what the results of obedience or disobedience would be as we see it written in Leviticus 26.

We find covenants made between men and men, between men and women, and between tribes and nations.

There are promises and agreements made with others to fulfill their word. God made a covenant with Himself in the story of Abraham. Reference Hebrews 6:13-20.

Keep in mind that the covenant was the agreement between God and Israel, whereas, the blood was the testimony(witness) of their agreement. This is why it is called a testament (seal). It testifies to the solemnity of the agreement.

So when the Israelites agreed to the 'wedding contract" at Mt Sinai. - remembering in a Hebrew wedding, that at the engagement the brides family and the groom come to an agreement which basically establishes the kutuba,(what each party is bringing to the table and what each party will do and commit to), it is as if they are already married at this point. After which if the bride accepts the terms she drinks a cup of wine. It is celebrated with a glass of wine- (which points to all the cups we drink at Passover.) which also represents the blood, which is one of the necessary elements of a covenant.

There is a sevenfold ceremony involved in cutting a covenant You don't make a covenant you "cut" one it will include:

1. The sacrifice of an animal
2. The walk of blood

3.The cutting of palms or wrists

4.The exchange of weapon belts

5.The exchange of Mantles

6.The exchange of names

7.The covenant meal

Each of these actions were symbolic of two people becoming one. We will discuss these in detail at a later date.

So when they produced the golden calf just after just stating they would obey and do whatever God told them to do that was written in the testament- note: all these are legal terms) and so at this point they had entered into a marriage covenant with God. However, when they began to worship the golden calf, they broke the covenant by whoring after another deity. According to the Laws of an adulterous wife. That penalty would have been death.

God promised Israel that in the latter days He would establish a New Covenant with them. "Behold the days comes, says God that I will make a new covenant with house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they broke,

although I was a husband to them, saith God. But this shall be covenant that I will make with house of Israel; after those days saith God, I will put my law in their inward parts, write it in their hearts and I will be their El and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying Know God for they shall all know me from least of them into the greater to them, says God, for I will forgive this iniquity and I will remember their sin no more. Jeremiah 31:31-34

When Jesus was in the room with His disciples, He was introducing them to the promised Renewed Covenant. He was preparing them for the shedding of His blood, which would be the testament, witness, evidence or signature, seal of the New Covenant God had promised. Since Jesus is God He not only gave the covenant promise to Israel, He ratified it with His Own Blood. Sealed it.

In short the Old Testament taught that marriage was intended to be a permanent, covenantal relationship between a man, who was to protect and provide for his bride and his bride, to remain in a monogamous to her husband. Marriage between legitimate partners were insured by God. The Law called for the execution of a woman who had broken her marital vow and when the Israelites stood at Mt Sinai and took their vows, there was falling away when they worshipped the golden calf. In one moment they had taken their vows and not long after began worshipping or having an adulterous affair with a golden calf. The penalty is death. See, Deut 22:22. Leviticus 20-10

Deuteronomy 24: 1-4, When man takes a wife and marries her, if she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a **certificate of divorce** and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter man hates her and writes her a a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before God. You shall not bring sin upon the land that God your Elohim/Judge is giving you for an inheritance.

So when God divorced Israel there is no way that Israel can come back to her former husband after a writ of divorce was given her.

(Jeremiah 3:8) I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her ways because of all her adulteries. Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear; and she went out and committed adultery, (vs 9) (Berean Study bible)

Indifferent to her own infidelity, Israel had defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. (Vs 10) Yet in spite of all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to Me with all her heart but only with pretense. (vs 11) And God said to me, "Faithless Israel has shown herself more righteous than unfaithful Judah. (Vs 12) Go and proclaim this message to the north;

"Return, O faithless Israel declares God, I will no longer look upon you with anger for I am merciful; declares God I will not be angry forever, (vs 13) Only acknowledge your guilt, that you have rebelled against God your Elohim/ Judge, you have scattered your favors to foreign gods under every green tree and have not obeyed My voice declares God. " Return O faithless children declares God, for I am your master and I will bring you back to the land of Israel, one from this town and two from that family and wherever you are scattered.

If God is a just judge and cannot break His own laws because He is the originator of them, then How can He bring Israel back legally? because according to scripture if the bride was unfaithful. Jesus took the punishment on the cross for all of Israel. He died so that the bride could legally be re-wed and not be called an adulteress.

Let's take a look at Hosea 3:1-5 And God said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the Master loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins."²So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech(roughly 430 pounds) of barley.³And I said to her, "You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you."⁴For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods.⁵Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek God their Elohim, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the master and to His goodness in the latter days.

Godweh commands Hosea to marry a “wife of whoredom hebrew word [zenunim]” (1:2). This Hebrew term alludes to illicit sexual behavior. Moses uses the word in *Genesis* 38:24 to refer to Tamar’s posing as a shrine prostitute in order to entice Judah. Hosea’s wife, Gomer, bears this label, not necessarily because she is a prostitute but because she is (or will become) a woman characterized by sexual infidelity.

The ESV translates the last phrase of Hosea 1:2, “for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Master.” The Hebrew reads, “for the land commits great whoredom from after God.” This is the first of a series of expressions in Hosea where God puts himself in the place of a forsaken human lover (cf. comment on 2:2-5 [esp. v. 5]). Hosea does as Godweh instructed and marries Gomer, who then bears him a son (1:3). In Hosea 3:1-5, the prophet tells his story, as once more he is called to image Godweh. But is the woman he now pursues his wife, Gomer? The text does not explicitly identify her. She is an adulteress, and “another man” loves her (v. 1). But it would hardly make sense if this woman were not Gomer. The whole point seems to be that her estranged husband sought her out, did what was needed to redeem her from her lover, and brought her back into his house, at great cost to himself (silver and foodstuffs; v. 2). This extraordinary expression of love reflects how God has loved Israel. She, too, is faithless, and betrays her husband through her worship of other gods. Raisin cakes (v. 1)—which are mentioned along with “other gods”—were apparently an element of pagan religion, and their mention here underscores Israel’s faithlessness. She loves her promiscuity.

Hosea lays down the law to Gomer: she is to be celibate for a season. Her nymphomaniacal addiction must be cured through abstinence “for many days” (v. 3). Of course, he promises to abstain as well (“so will I also be to you”).

This is a picture of the nation, which for “many days” would be bereft of idolatrous kings (v. 4). At the very least, this means that Israel would no longer be a sovereign nation. It may also be that her political leadership is mentioned in particular because it was the engine of false religion and is specifically targeted in order for false religion to stop as well. In either case, the destruction they will experience will be sufficiently thorough to wipe out political structures and worship practices (“without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods”; v. 4).

So we await the bridegroom who gave His life for Israel, so that we might be reconciled to the Father. For adultery meant the husband must die. If a covenant is until death do us part. Jesus took the punishment of an unfaithful bride and gave His life as a substitute for his bride. So the bride would be free to remarry and not be called an adulterer. We set our hope for the marriage supper of the lamb.

We can go more into detail on this at a later date but let's proceed forward with covenant/ contract and what that looks like. This study could go in many directions as you can glean from the above passages.

Marriage covenant:

As Jesus said to His disciples in John 14:3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming back again and I will receive you to Myself, that is where I am that you may be also.

Which is exactly what the bride groom does once the covenant agreement and arrangement between the bride and groom are finalized. He goes to prepare a place for her.

First you have the betrothal which involved the prospective grooms traveling from his father's house to the home of the prospective bride, paying the purchase price and establishing the marriage covenant. The bride if in agreement will take of a cup of wine.

Second The groom's returns to his fathers house (which meant he would be separate from his bride for 12 months, during which time he prepared the living accommodations for his wife in his father's house.

Third The grooms coming for his bride at a time not known exactly to her;

Fourth His return with her to the grooms fathers house to consummate the marriage and to celebrate the wedding feast for the next seven days (during which the bride remains closeted in her bridal chamber)

When the father of the groom made the arrangements for the marriage and paid the bridal price. The timing of the arrangement varied. Sometimes it occurred when both children were small and at other times it was a year before the marriage itself. Often the bride and the groom did not even meet until their wedding day. The second step which occurred a year or more after the first step was the fetching of the bride. The bridegroom would go to the home of the bride in order to bring her to his home. In connection with this step two things should be noted. First it was the father of the groom who determined the timing. Second prior to the groom's leaving to fetch the bride, he must have already prepared

a place for their abode. This was followed by the third step, the wedding ceremony, to which a few would be invited. Prior to the wedding ceremony, the bride would undergo a ritual immersion for cleansing and the fourth step was the marriage ceremony. In the Marriage of the lamb all four of these steps are evident according to scripture.

Marriage Covenant- Father pays for the bride price and established the marriage covenant. Acts 20:28, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, 1 Corinthians 11:25 and Ephesians 5:25-27.

Bridal Chamber Prepared- The son returns to his father's house and prepares and bridal chamber. John 6:62, John 14:2, Acts 1:9-11.

Bride is fetched- At a time determined by the Father Matthew 24:36, the groom fetches the bride to bring her to his father's house. Although the bride was expecting her groom to come for her, she did not know the time of his coming. As a result the groom's arrival was preceded by a shout, which forwarded the bride to be prepared for his coming. John 14:3, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

Bride is Cleansed- The bride undergoes ritual cleansing prior to the wedding ceremony. 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, Revelation 19:7-8,

Wedding Ceremony- The private wedding ceremony. Revelation 19

Consummation- In the privacy of the bridal chamber the bride and groom consummate the marriage. Revelation 19

Marriage Feast- The celebratory marriage feast to which many are invited. Mat 22:1-14, Matthew 25:1-13, Luke 12:36

So we can look at the difference between covenant and contract and see what a difference it makes. Covenants are eternal- Contracts temporary. God's covenants are eternal and so we can rest in His eternality.